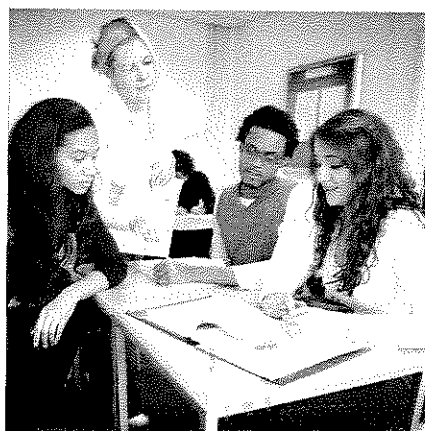


“Attacking the Common Core Standards” Informational Texts – Part Three: Using textual evidence to support inferences within a Non-Fiction Text

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In [Parts One](#) and [Two](#) of this series, we talked about using biographies and historical context to dig into the depths of the Informational Text standards—while avoiding abandoning fictional texts. This article will begin to break down the Informational Texts Standards into practical and accessible “chunks,” giving tips on approaching the standard using Informational Texts.

First, let’s look at the first Informational Text standard for grades 6-12:

- RI.6.1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.7.1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what

the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- RI.8.1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL.9-10.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.11-12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

So, what do these all have in common? Let’s break it down.

To varying degrees:

- Students should demonstrate the ability to read a nonfiction passage or text, understand and articulate what the text directly as well as indirectly states in order to make an assumption about or respond to prompts from the text.
- Students should be able to identify, extract, and cite text to thoroughly support the student’s response.
- Students should demonstrate the ability to identify a passage or text that leaves unanswered questions, to determine possible reasons for the ambiguity, and to articulate the implications from the uncertainties. (Grades 11-12 only)

In plain English: *Students must be able to read a non-fictional text, identifying and citing direct and indirect statements to demonstrate an understanding of the information found within the text.*

The concept of inference is one of the most difficult to teach, however even as low as grade 4, the concept must be addressed in some form or another, usually by reading a fictional text and being able to make an assumption or

guess based on the evidence or facts from the text combined with their own prior knowledge. However, as we can see in these standards, students must be able to make inferences from an Informational Text as well as a fictional text.

Infer – verb; to conclude by using logic

Forms of the verb include: *infer, inferring, inferred*

Inference – noun; the process of drawing conclusions based on logic

Both definitions include the words logic, and variations of the words conclude. To conclude is to form an opinion or reach a decision about something. Logic is sensible, rational thought or argument based on facts rather than emotion. In other words, to infer is to *form an opinion based on facts*.

There are several ways of teaching inference. At the very basic level, students must be able to discern between fact and opinion. I will assume that students are able to understand fact versus opinion by the fourth grade, but if not, start there.

Beyond that, students must be able to make observations. Observations are clues—things that the student sees—either literally (as in a picture) or figuratively (as in a paragraph or story). Observations are factual and can be proven. From observations, students must then use the knowledge they have been given and/or their own personal knowledge to make an inference. Inferences are personal and contain opinion.

When approaching an Informational Text (non-fiction), it can be a common mistake for students to automatically assume that everything they are reading is truthful and factual. After all, it is an informational text, and the author is assumed to be more knowledgeable about a subject than the reader. Students must be warned that not everything one reads that sounds legitimate and logical, actually is. Take articles on the Internet for example. Anyone who has a computer can write what appears to be a scholarly article, post it on the Internet, and call themselves an expert. However, few are actually experts, and the “information” they are providing can contain fallacies, bias, and inaccuracies. Students need to realize that not only do they need to comprehend what the text tells them directly. Take a look at this passage, taken from a Wikipedia article on the Jim Crow Laws:

*Some examples of Jim Crow laws are the segregation of public schools, public places, and public transportation, and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants, and drinking fountains for whites and blacks. The U.S. military was also segregated. These Jim Crow Laws were separate from the 1800–1866 Black Codes, which had previously restricted the civil rights and civil liberties of African Americans. State-sponsored school segregation was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Generally, the remaining Jim Crow laws were overruled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964[1] and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.*

Not only must students support what the text says explicitly (directly): The final Jim Crow Laws were overturned in 1965, but they can also infer what the text alludes to, or states indirectly, i.e. African-Americans were legally discriminated against and held to a lower social status in the United States until 1965.

Students should be able to answer questions about the text using both these explicit as well as implicit statements, providing support for their answers. Here are two examples using general questions one might find attached to an Informational Text document or passage:

Question #1: Would this document (passage) be considered persuasive, narrative, descriptive, or expository? Give reasons for your choice.

Sample Student Answer: This passage would be considered expository, as it is using factual evidence, including dates and citations to support the document. For example, the passage states that the final Jim Crow laws were overturned in 1965.

Question #2: How does the author feel towards the subject of the document? What loaded or biased language do you notice, if any?

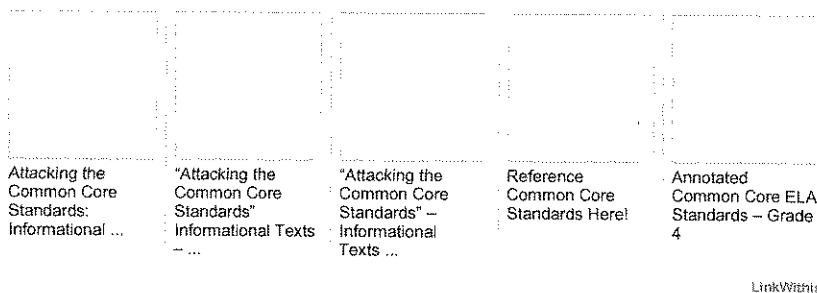
Sample Student Answer: There is no bias or loaded language evident in this passage. The author simply states facts, and it is up to the reader to make inferences based on those facts. For example, one can assume that African-Americans were legally discriminated against and held to a lower social status in the United States until 1965.

The more students read about or study a subject, the more comfortable they begin to feel making assumptions or inferences about the subject. This takes time and practice, which is why introducing a variety of Informational Texts when teaching a piece of literature is so valuable. The more students learn about the historical and aesthetic background of a text, the more they can appreciate the meaning and significance of the literature itself. (See Informational Texts: [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#))

For more help with teaching Inference and Observation, see my [FREE handout and activity on TPT](#).

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